

## The King in the City: The King's Conspiracy

Mark 11:27-12:12

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I'm not sure if you've ever done the math on what we know about the life of Jesus or not, but it's highly stacked to the end. So a quarter of Luke looks only at the last week of Jesus' life. And a third of both Matthew and Mark do the same. And almost half of John covers just Passion Week.

Other than that we only get the highlights. It's Jesus walking on the water. It's the Sermon on the Mount. It's Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead – stuff like that. But for the last week of Jesus' life we get a lot of detail.

And what this means was Jesus was brilliant at flying under the radar. We've talked about this before, but while Jesus was constantly doing big and powerful things, He did them in a way that didn't attract attention. In other words He was totally the opposite of magicians like Pen and Teller. They are constantly doing tricks in ways that make people think they are awesome, but Jesus did miracles in ways people were able to blink and not notice. And so nobody was writing stuff down until the end when all the pieces came together.

And this wasn't a mistake. Had Jesus wanted to grow a fan base He could have easily capitalized on the crowds. But instead He turned them away. It would have been easy to mobilize an army of angry Rome haters who had just eaten free lunch, but instead Jesus went off by Himself to pray.

And the reason was that Jesus had a plan. He was conspiring with the Father to take things in a different direction than anyone else anticipated. You see Jesus wasn't interested in being king in Rome; He didn't want to rule a dynasty. He wanted to be king in our hearts. And He wants to transform life as we know it by bringing us back to the Garden we were created for.

So His miracles weren't done to prove He was powerful, but to prove He was redemptive. He came not to become great, but to become Servant of All. And so everything He did was done in such a way that it required eyes of faith to understand. And all of this was part of the plan - part of His and the Father's conspiracy.

- 1.) What is your name?
- 2.) Why do you think Jesus performed His miracles in such a way that people were able to witness them and still doubt?
- 3.) Why do you think many people get afraid or excited about conspiracy?

Go ahead and open the Bible on your phone or grab your paper copy. We are in Mark 11 and we will be picking it up in verse 27 today. As you find that would you stand with me in respect and hunger to hear God speak? Hear now the word of the Lord.

[Read Mark 11:27-12:12]

So we are in Tuesday of Holy week. On Sunday Jesus entered Jerusalem riding the first century version of a KIA Pride – He’s intentionally tying together character traits that never naturally co-exist. He’s full of kingly authority and humility, sovereignty and submission, and He wants to reproduce His character in us.

And then on Monday He returns to the temple to make space for marginalized. Jesus’ passion is that the poor and the powerless are enabled to connect with God. And He wants His passion to be our passion. And now it’s Tuesday and everything Jesus is and is doing is hitting the fan.

So the religious leaders have gotten their ducks in a row and they are ticked with Jesus – they want Him dead. But they’ve got a problem. They’ve got jurisdiction in the temple, but none the courts – pastors don’t get to carry out capital punishment – though I’d vote for that. Anyone with me?... No. So they had to get Jesus to incriminate Himself with something they could toss up the ladder. And the plan they came up with was to ask a question without an answer - “Whose authority are You operating under?”

And this is the context of our passage. And Jesus responds to their question and what we get is a truth claim, a threat and a promise.<sup>1</sup> And that’s where we’re going today.

So first the truth claim. Here’s the setup. In verse 27 Mark tells us that it’s the chief priest, the teachers of the law and the elders who came to Jesus with this question. And it’s not an accident that we get such a detailed list here.

Mark’s telling us this is the Sanhedrin. These guys were part of 71 men in Jerusalem who ran the temple. And the temple was the center of Israelite culture. So they ran the show. And they’re mad because Jesus was bringing change to their show.

Last week we talked about how there were around 2.5 million people worshipping at the temple during Passover. And to accommodate them roughly 250,000 sheep would be sold, bought and sacrificed. And to finance all this, hundreds of money changers from all over the nation would have booths set up along the outer walls of the temple. And this is where the gentiles were supposed to pray. And Jesus looked at all this busyness and said:

“The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations,’ but you have turned it into a den of thieves.” (Mark 11:17)

Jesus says “You’ve turned the space where people are supposed to connect with God into a soulless operation. There is lots of busyness but no godliness.” And Jesus meek and mild, grabs a whip, and starts flipping tables and driving money changers out of the temple. And Jesus is not being sensitive or diplomatic.

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<sup>1</sup> Outline adapted from: <https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/the-authority-of-jesus-6496/> (Accessed Oct 8, 2021)

And so these leaders approach Jesus – the leaders who set everything up – and they ask Him for His license and registration – “Sir, put your hands on the wheel and tell us by whose authority are you doing all this?”

And there’s no answer for this. You see there’s a very detailed authority structure in Rome and Israel at this time. It’s a big hierarchy and everyone has a spot and everyone needs to stay in their spot. And there is no ambiguity. So no matter what Jesus says they’ll have Him. If Jesus is acting on His own authority that’s not the right answer. And if He’s working with God that’s worse – that’s their role. And if He’s got some other political ally He will have overstepped His space and Rome smashed square pegs into round holes. And that was their hope. Just get Him to say anything and we will have Him.

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The problem is you can’t wake up early enough to get Jesus to misspeak. Wouldn’t that be nice? Like this is not me. When you hit me with a hard question I stammer and then just start talking until I’ve dug myself in as deep as I can. And then I spend the night kicking myself about all the things I should have said – that’s my M.O. but not Jesus. He knows exactly what they are doing and so replies “You want to know where I get My authority? I’ll tell you if you tell Me what you think about John’s baptism.”

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Now this might look like smoke screening – “Let’s change the subject.” But that’s not what Jesus is doing. Actually He’s answering their question because His authority and John’s baptism are tied together. And that’s what makes His question impossible to answer.

So John was out there. No Starbucks for him. It was camel hair, locust and honey. And John’s message was “Prepare the way for the Lord. Get ready. Someone so powerful is coming I can’t even untie His shoes.” Of course that’s Jesus.

And the people loved John. And they loved him even more when Herod killed him. Now He was a prophet and a martyr. And so the Sanhedrin couldn’t throw John under the bus – the people wouldn’t have it. And so they were stuck. Verse 32 says:

They were afraid of what the people would do, because everyone believed that John was a prophet. (Mark 11:32)

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Now here’s where this gets real. Jesus knew that fear was driving the leaders of the temple. And fear is Satan’s domain – fear is demonic. Whenever fear is your motivating factor you aren’t acting with God. And our culture feeds on fear. The media is full of it because fear sells.

I’m not sure if you heard or not but Facebook is in hot water because a whistleblower told everyone that their algorithm that pumps content onto your page knows that you look longer at stories that make you either angry or afraid. And so the algorithm figures out what you’re afraid of, or afraid of losing, and then feeds it to you so that you look longer at the ads and Facebook makes more money.

Now it's hilarious that the media is reporting on a conspiracy to get you to pay attention so they can make money – because that's the same game they play, left and right. Everyone wants to make you afraid because it gives them power and money.

But Jesus isn't afraid. And if you're with Jesus then you will not be afraid either. You won't be afraid either on the left or the right. You won't be afraid you are going to get sick and die, and you won't be afraid of some conspiracy to take over the world. Jesus isn't afraid of either of those things – He wins. And if you're with Him then you win too – so don't go left or right go fearless with Jesus!

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And then Jesus tells a story to drive this all home. So there is this man who plants a vineyard. And he rents it to a bunch of farmers and lets them run the show. And then when the crops are ready, he sends some servants to collect the rent. But the farmers run some of them off and kill others. And so finally the man sends his son thinking they will respect him. But they kill him and throw him out of the vineyard.

And Jesus isn't being that cryptic. In verse 12 we see that the religious leaders knew He was telling this story against them. He was answering their question – “You want to know whose authority I am operating under – My authority is linked to John's baptism, and it's like a vineyard.” And here's the truth claim.

The man in the story is God, the messengers are the prophets and Jesus is the Son. And that makes the vineyard His. Jesus says: “The temple's Mine! The land is Mine. Everything belongs to the Son. But the farmers – that's the religious leaders and us – we fall into thinking this is ours. But Jesus doesn't agree. This is My temple. This is My land. You work for Me.

That's the claim. And the claim is attached to a threat. And all of this was pretty offensive to the temple leaders. Who does Jesus think He is? But actually this strikes a lot closer to home than we might like.

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So my family lives in a three bedroom duplex. And that means the boys have a triple bunk and Elliana gets her own room. And she's happy about this though she would trade any one of the boys for a sister. But the problem is that all four kids take piano and the piano is in Elliana's room. Enter the drama. The boys have learned that the piano gives them jurisdiction to enter a forbidden sanctuary.

Now nobody wants to practice piano – piano is something evil parents inflict on their children to build character. But the little brother-sinners have figured out that they can reduce their mature big sister to a puddle of raging tears by banging out a few notes. And so the fight is “It's my room – get out.” “Well, it's my turn to practice piano.”

And of course the answer to all this is to march all the kids out to stand in the rain while I explain that actually it's my house. I paid for it. That makes it my bedroom and my piano, at least until the bank wants to call the mortgage. So get along.

Well, if you think I'm a terrible parent, Jesus' parable is even worse. Verse 9 says:  
 "What do you suppose the owner of the vineyard will do?" Jesus asked. "I'll tell you—he will come and kill those farmers and lease the vineyard to others. (Mark 12:9)

See I never go that far – what a great parent I am! But here's the point: nothing we've got is ours. It's not my money or my time or my job or my children. Everything belongs to Jesus. Everything we've got is a grace and ultimately belongs to Him and must be used for the increase of His glory and the expanse of His kingdom. He's coming to collect the rent. And He doesn't negotiate with terrorists.

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Now this flies directly in the face of everything Canada is preaching. In Canada it is all about filling your life with the best things you possibly can. And we hate the idea that anyone would tell us what to do with our money or our skills or heaven forbid our time. You see because we are so rich our time is our most valuable asset. And we want to spend it on our comfort. That's what it means to be Canadian.

But Jesus says no – none of this is yours. It's My vineyard. It's all mine. 100% of it is Mine. Not 10%. All of it. Everything you've got is on lease from Me. You're renting the breath you are taking. You're renting the strength you've got. You're renting your ability to purchase a vehicle or a house. You're renting it all from Me. It's all Mine. And because it's Mine I expect a return on what I've leased to you.

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So I've got some rental properties. And occasionally one of my tenants will tell me "You're rich, so you can afford it if I don't pay rent." They never say it quite like that – they just don't pay. And when that happens I evict them because it's my house. And when the new landlord calls for a reference I just tell the truth – "They don't pay rent." So Jesus says "Life goes badly if you don't give the Owner what He deserves."

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Now we all swim in the same fishbowl and in Canada the color of the water here is all about comfort, freedom and safety – these are all the biggest virtues in Canada. And we believe we deserve them. We believe we are entitled to them because we live here. But Jesus says none of this is yours. It's not yours. Your life is not your own. It belongs to the Owner of the vineyard. And if you will not use it – all of it – to build His kingdom then life will go badly for you. And that's because I'm the cornerstone.

So in verse 10 Jesus says:

Didn't you ever read this in the Scriptures?  
 'The stone that the builders rejected  
 has now become the cornerstone.  
 This is the LORD's doing,  
 and it is wonderful to see.' (Mark 12:10-11)

Jesus is quoting Psalm 118 here – actually the next verse in the Psalm says "Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" – that's what the people were saying when Jesus rode into town. And it's not an accident. It's a Messianic Psalm.

And at the center of the Psalm is this parable about a cornerstone. And in the Psalm it doesn't seem to fit, but Jesus makes the connection. It's John's baptism, it's a vineyard it's a cornerstone. You want to know about My authority? Here it is.

A cornerstone is the most precious, most expensive stone in any structure. It gives shape and integrity to the whole building. So if any angles on the cornerstone are off then the whole building is off. If the cornerstone is weak, if it crumbles under pressure, then the whole building is coming down. And this is how authority works.

You see everyone finds something to make the cornerstone in their lives. Everyone does this. Everyone holds onto something and says this is what gives my life shape and meaning. And Jesus says unless I am the cornerstone of your life your life is going to crumble. Anything else that you build your life, on no matter how great it is, will eventually collapse.

And we see this with the Sanhedrin. They look super successful to everyone but they've built their lives on the position of being in control and the power it gives them. This is what gave them meaning – they ran the temple. They were important. And everything looked good except that that this meant they were afraid. You see Jesus' authority exposed the crack in their own authority. They were afraid to lose what they had. They were afraid of the people.

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So what's the cornerstone in your life? What is the most important thing that you push everything else out of the way to make room for? Everyone's busy today, but the fact is we all make room for our cornerstone. So what's yours? What is it that gives you meaning and value in life? What are you afraid to lose?

Is it a relationship? Is it your health; your comfort; your safety? Are these the most important things to maintain? "If you don't have your health you don't have anything." That's what Canada preaches. Or is it your freedom? Is that the one thing that riles you up and gets your blood boiling? Is that the thing worth fighting for?

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Friends, if these kinds of things are your cornerstones then you are living in fear of what you could lose. And all these things can disappear in a second and be gone forever. And in fact Jesus says they are going to disappear. If we put anything else at the center life goes badly – that's the threat.

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So there's a claim – it's all Jesus' vineyard. Everything belongs to Him and He expects a return. And there's a threat – if you put anything else at the center life will go badly. But the good news is that there's also a promise. And we'll end with this.

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Three days before Good Friday Jesus tells us about a strange Father who loses a bunch of servants to murderous tenants and then sends His Son. This is crazy! What father would jeopardize His son? But this is the beauty of the gospel.

You see the Father and the Son were co-conspirators in a radical plan of mercy and grace aimed at saving the wicked tenants of the vineyard. Try to get your head around that! You are the wicked tenant in this story. You and me are the ones who haven't listened to God's messengers and have instead decided we want to build our lives on our own cornerstones. We killed the Son. And that means we deserve verse 9 – we deserve to be killed and thrown out of the vineyard.

But God so loved the world full of rebellious and hateful tenants that He sent His one and only Son. And Jesus is the rightful heir to the vineyard. He had the law on His side. Jesus could have come back and said I am the authority; I'm going to claim the throne. But instead of taking up a crown of jewels He took up the crown of thorns.

Instead of throwing you out He said "I am going to go outside the walls of Jerusalem and allow Myself to be crucified so you can enjoy the pleasures of the vineyard." Jesus the Son gave up what He was entitled to so us rebellious haters could become children of God. This is the co-conspiracy of the Father and the Son. This is the gospel.

Friends, it's bad news that none of what we've got is ours. It's bad news that unless we make Jesus the cornerstone and give 100% of ourselves to living for His glory He'll kill us and throw us out of the vineyard. All that is bad news until you see that the owner of the vineyard loves us so much that He conspired to pay for our stupid rebellion Himself.

And when this actually gets ahold of you it empowers you to stop trying to be your own crumbling cornerstone – I mean how is life working out with you at the center anyway?

But friends, when we make Jesus our cornerstone we step into the reality of the mystery of His kingdom. You see it's not the wealthy or the comfortable or the safe or the free who win. They don't win. It's the last who are first. It's those who lay their lives down that get to pick them up. It's ironically those who take up their cross and follow Jesus to Golgotha who actually get the abundant life we are all seeking.

So friends, cling to the offensive claim of authority – none of this is yours. Cling to the reality of the threat – all the rest is crumbling sand. And cling to the promise of the co-conspiracy of the Father and the Son – I've come that you might have life and have it to the full. Cling to the cross because the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone and it's marvelous in our eyes.